

“iatreuontes”, translated by Crislip as “physicians” and “doctors”, although it can simply mean “those who treat”. In the face of such sparse evidence, he resorts to arguments like the following (p. 116): “There is no contemporary evidence for the architecture of the hospital [founded by St Basil], nor is there any description of the types of medical procedures employed. Nevertheless, since Basil himself as a young man was trained in standard Hippocratic and Galenic medicine we may suppose that a similar standard was employed in his hospital.”

Apart from these generalizations and interpretative liberties, Crislip’s approach also lacks theoretical rigour. Following Miller, Crislip attaches great importance to the distinction between “hospices” and “hospitals”, the latter being characterized by the presence of professional physicians. Whether this distinction between caring and curing or the quest for the first hospital thus defined are useful has rightly been questioned by scholars such as Peregrine Holden and Vivian Nutton (none of whose contributions published during the last two decades is cited). Finally, out of a desire to find the present in the past, as it would appear, Crislip frequently employs modern terminology such as the term “triage officer”. The “triage” in the monasteries of Egypt has, however, little to do with that occurring in modern hospitals. In the former, an elder who often was not a physician himself would determine whether the patient was really sick or merely pretending to be so in order to gain remission from the harsh duties and access to better food (and maybe even some wine); he would then decide whether the disease was caused by a demon, therefore requiring exorcism, or by natural causes.

Despite these criticisms, Crislip’s book contains some interesting material, for instance, when he quotes from hitherto unpublished Coptic sources. And, like that by Timothy S Miller, it will undoubtedly provoke fruitful scholarly debate.

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**Ken Arnold**, *Cabinets for the curious: looking back at early English museums*, Perspectives on Collecting series, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005, pp. xii, 297, £47.50, \$94.95 (hardback 0-7546-0506-X).

For those engaged in the modern world of museum practice, where time to reflect on the importance of our collections and the enquiry that should inform how we make use of them can easily vie with so many other imperatives, Ken Arnold’s new book compels us to address the need to regain our perspective on the contribution of collectors and collections as sources of meaning, creativity and knowledge.

Arnold illuminates this study by an absorbing exploration of seventeenth-century English collecting activity and the birth of what he terms “museum-science”. Focusing on a number of leading scholars and collectors, and on early curators such as Lord Arundel and Robert Plot, alongside the influence of scientific and philosophical thinkers of the period, he explores the creation of formal institutions that became the repositories for their activities. His early chapters show how these collectors encompassed the tradition of narrative, functional and taxonomic approaches, but which gave way in time to a dominant concern with taxonomy, through which we can trace the accumulation of the vast “survey” collections that became the foundation of the modern museum. Growing emphasis on taxonomic order arising out of contemporary philosophical concerns with education, language, memory and even theology drove forward the museum preoccupation with classification and identification to become all pervading by the nineteenth century, and reflected still in our major national and academic collections. Underlying this process was of course the exclusion of any form of material that failed to submit to this approach or alternative strategies for collecting, or for considering the meaning of what they contain.

Later chapters attempt what he considers to be the important task of connecting contemporary debate about the role of the modern curator with the seventeenth-century origins of museum collecting. Arnold explains how innovation in the

way some of our best museums are seeking to regenerate their collections, through more experimental approaches to interpretation, interdisciplinary collaboration, the involvement of external “curators”, and thematic projects and exhibitions, has resonance with the work of early modern curators. They are linked by their aspiration to make new discoveries by subjecting their collections to a more speculative and subjective ideas-led approach.

Arnold’s regret at the decline of the seventeenth-century collector’s engagement with the curious and wonderful underlies his fundamentally optimistic thesis that museums can reinvigorate their capacity to help us comprehend our natural and man-made world. His call is to redress the balance from what he sees as the current obsession for museums to ensure they are above all sources of information and education, where objects are easily obscured by images, technology and interactivity that often convey a worthy, but oppressive, overload of messages. Instead, he sets out an argument for objects as the direct focus for inspiring and provoking audiences and for museums as places where we can find pleasure and excitement, and create ideas, knowledge and understanding.

This bold and exhilarating study combines polemic relevant to the modern museum practitioner with historical insight that makes an important contribution to the study of early modern museums. It draws on wide-ranging scholarship, museological, historical and from the history of ideas, as well as expert knowledge of a museum curator. It challenges what are still fundamental values amongst a significant number of contemporary curators today; it is hard, for example, to see that many of the academic specialists working in certain national institutions would be prepared to abandon the rigorous and empirical approach that underpins their endeavours. Yet Arnold makes a refreshing and disarming plea for the regeneration of the idea of a “cabinet of curiosity” that he rightly appreciates remains central to the cultural and intellectual fascination of museums.

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**John L Burton** (ed.), *‘Six hundred miseries’: the seventeenth century womb: book 15 of ‘The practice of physick’ by Lazare Rivière*, trans. Nicholas Culpeper (London 1678), London, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2005, pp. xvi, 216, illus., £24.95 (hardback 1-904752-13-6).

Before 1700 the popular demand for English-language publications on midwifery and related matters was met by translations and extracts from continental works, since almost nothing came from English writers at this time. Nicholas Culpeper (d. 1664), arguably one of the most influential and popular writers of the late 1640s and the 1650s, translated a number of texts from the best contemporary authorities. After his death, the London booksellers capitalized on Culpeper’s reputation and printed dozens of authorized and unauthorized posthumous editions of the *English physician* (1652) and *English physician enlarged* (1653). His name was also included in the titles of various translations of continental texts, including the works of the French physician, Lazare Rivière (d. 1655). It is the English translation of Book 15 of Rivière’s *Practice of physic* (Of the Diseases of Women) that John L Burton has edited and annotated in *‘Six hundred miseries’: the seventeenth century womb*.

I read Burton’s *‘Six hundred miseries’* with pleasure and welcome the fact that Rivière’s fascinating and largely inaccessible work has been made available to both the general and the medical reader. The modern edition of the translation of Rivière provides a valuable insight into the medical thinking and practice of obstetric and gynaecological medicine of the seventeenth century. It will also capture the interest of those who want to explore the range of therapeutic medicines on offer to women, both for “life-threatening” disorders and for afflictions of daily life which were just plain inconvenient. Green sickness (chlorosis), menstrual irregularities, Mother-Fits (hysteria), inflammations of the womb, cancer, infertility, abortion and miscarriage, in addition to complications during childbirth are some of the many female conditions discussed in the text. John Burton has